Not Sure About It.

"You are giving your daughter a musical education, aren't you?"

"Well, I can't say that exactly, but I am paying for one."

The Cow Puncher

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"BUT I'M SICK OF IT ALL"

Synopsis.—David Elden, son of a drunken, shiftless ranchman, almost a maverick of the foothills, is breaking bottles with his pistol from his running cayuse when the first automobile he has ever seen arrives and tips over, breaking the leg of Doctor Hardy but not injuring his beautiful daughter Irene. Dave rescues the injured man and brings a doctor from 40 miles away. Irene takes charge of the housekeeping.

CHAPTER I—Continued.

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After breakfast Irene attended to the wants of her father, and by this time the visiting doctor was manifesting impatience to be away. But Dave declared with prompt finality that the horses must rest until after noon, and the doctor, willy-nilly, spent the morning rambling in the foothills. Meanwhile the girl busied herself with work about the house, in which she was effecting a rapid transformation.

After the midday dinner Dave harnessed the team for the journey to town, but before leaving inquired of Irene if there were any special purchases, either personal or for the use of the house, which she would recommend. With some diffidence she mentioned one that was uppermost in her thoughts—soap, both laundry and toilet. Doctor Hardy had no hesitation in calling for a box of his favorite cigars and some new magazines, and took occasion to press into the boy's hand a bill out of all proportion to the value of the supplies requested.

The day was introductory to others that were to follow. Dave returned the next afternoon, riding his own horse and heavily laden with cigars, magazines and soap.

The following day it was decided that the automobile, which since the accident had laid upturned by the roadway, should be brought to the ranch buildings. Dave harnessed his team and, instead of riding one of the horses, walked behind, driving by the reins, and accompanied by the girl, who had proclaimed her ability to steer the car.

With the aid of the team and Dave's lariat the car was soon righted and was found to be none the worse for its deflection from the beaten track. Irene presided at the steering-wheel, watching the road with great intentness and turning the wheel too far on each occasion, which gave to her course a somewhat wavy or undulating order, such as is found in bread-knives; or perhaps a better figure would be to compare it to that rolling motion affected by fancy skaters. However, the mean of her direction corresponded with the mean of the trail and all went merrily until the stream was approached. Here was a rather steep descent and the car showed a sudden purpose to engage the horses in a contest of speed. She determined to use the foot-brake, a feat which was accomplished, under normal conditions, by pressing one foot firmly against a contraption somewhere beneath the steering-post. She shot a quick glance downward and, to her alarm, discovered not one, but three, contraptions, all apparently designed to receive the pressure of a foot—if one could reach them—and as similar as the steps of a stair. This involved a further hesitation, and in automobiling he who hesitates invites a series of rapid experiences. It was quite evident that the car was running away. It was quite evident that the horses were running away, too. The situation assumed the qualities of a race, and the only matter of grave doubt related to its termination.

Without Reply He Walked Stolidly Into the Cold Water, Took Her in His Arms and Carried Her Ashore.

Then they struck the water. It was not more than two feet deep, but the extra resistance it caused and the extra alarm it excited in the horses resulted in breaking the lariat. Dave clung fast to his team and they were soon brought to a standstill. Having pacified them, he tied them to a post and returned to the stream. The car sat in the middle; the girl had put her feet on the seat beside her, and the swift water flowed by a few inches below. She was laughing merrily when Dave, very wet in parts, appeared on the bank.

"Well, I'm not wet, except for a little splashing," she said, "and you are. Does anything occur to you?"

Without reply he walked stolidly into the cold water, took her in his arms and carried her ashore. The lariat was soon repaired and the car hauled to the ranch buildings without further mishap.

Later in the day he said to her: "Can you ride?"

"Some," she answered. "I have ridden city horses, but don't know about these ranch animals. But I would like to try—if I had a saddle."

"I have an extra saddle," he said. "But it's a man's. . . . They all ride that way here."

She made no answer and the subject was dropped for the time. But the next morning she saw Dave ride away, leading a horse by his side. He did not return until evening, but when he came the idle horse carried a saddle.

"It's a strad-legger," he said when he drew up beside Irene, "but it's a girl's. I couldn't find anythin' else in the whole diggin's."

"I'm sure it will do—splendidly—if I can just stick on," she replied. But another problem was already in her mind. It apparently had not occurred to Dave that women require special clothing for riding, especially if it's a "strad-legger." She opened her lips to mention this, then closed them again. He had been to enough trouble on her account. He had already spent a whole day scouring the country for a saddle. She would manage some way.

Late that night she was busy with scissors and needle.

CHAPTER II.

Doctor Hardy recovered from his injuries as rapidly as could be expected and, while he chafed somewhat over spending his holidays under such circumstances, the time passed not unhappily.

A considerable acquaintanceship had sprung up between him and the senior Elden. The rancher had come from the East forty years before, but in turning over their memories the two men found many links of association: third persons known to them both; places, even streets and houses, common to their feet in early manhood; events of local history which each could recall, although from different angles. And Elden's grizzled head and stooping frame carried more experiences than would fill a dozen well-rounded city lives, and he had the story-teller's art which scorns to spoil dramatic effect by a too strict adherence to fact. But no ray of conversation would he admit into the more personal affairs of his heart, or of the woman who had been his wife, and even when the talk turned on the boy he quickly withdrew it to another topic, as though the subject were dangerous or distasteful. But once, after a long silence following such a diversion, had he betrayed himself into a whispered remark, an outburst of feeling rather than a communication.

"I've been alone so much," he said. "It seems I have never been anything but alone. And—sooner or later—it gets you—it gets you."

"You have the boy," ventured the doctor.

"No," he answered, almost fiercely. "That would be different. I could stand it then. But I haven't got him, and I can't get him. He despises me because—because I take too much at times." He paused as though wondering whether to proceed with this unwonted confidence, but the ache in his heart insisted on its right to human sympathy. "No, it ain't that," he continued. "He despises me because he thinks I wasn't fair to his mother. He can't understand. I wanted to be good to her, to be close to her. Then I took to booze, as natural as a steer under the brandin'-iron roars to drown his hurt. But the boy don't understand. He despises me." Then, after a long silence: "No matter. I despise myself."

The doctor placed a hand on his shoulder. But Elden was himself again. The curtains of his life, which he had drawn apart for a moment, he whipped together again rudely, almost viciously, and covered his confusion by plunging into a tale of how he had led a breed suspected of cattle-rustling on a little canter of ten miles with a rope about his neck and the other end tied to the saddle. "He ran well," said the old man, chuckling still at the reminiscence. "And it was lucky he did. It was a strong rope."

The morning after Dave had brought in the borrowed saddle Irene appeared in a sort of bloomer suit, somewhat wonderfully contrived from a spare skirt, and announced a willingness to risk life and limb on any horse that Dave might select for that purpose. He provided her with a dependable mount and their first journey, taken somewhat gingerly along the principal trail, was accomplished without incident. It was the forerunner of many others, plunging deeper and deeper into the fastnesses of the foothills and even into the passes of the very mountains themselves. His patience was infinite and, although there were no silk trappings to his courtesy, it was a very genuine and manly deference he paid her. She was quite sure that he would at any moment give his life, if needed, to defend her from injury—and accept the transaction as a matter of course. His physical endurance was inexhaustible and his knowledge of prairie and foothill seemed to her almost uncanny. He read every sign of footprint, leaf, water and sky with unfailing insight. He had no knowledge of books, and she had at first thought him ignorant, but as the days went by she found in him a mine of wisdom which shamed her ready-made education.

After such a ride they one day dismounted in a grassy opening among the trees that bordered a mountain canyon. In a crevice they found a flat stone that gave comfortable seating and here they rested while the horses browsed their afternoon meal on the grass above. Both were conscious of a gradually increasing tension in the atmosphere. For days the boy had been moody. It was evident he was harboring something that was calling through his nature for expression, and Irene knew that this afternoon he would talk of more than trees and rocks and footprints of the wild things of the forest.

"Your father is getting along well," he said, at length.

"Yes," she answered. "He has had a good holiday, even with his broken leg."

"You will be goin' away before long," he continued.

"Yes," she answered, and waited.

"Things about here ain't goin' to be the same after you're gone," he went on. He wore no coat, and the neck of his shirt was open, for the day was warm. Had he caught her sidelong glances, even his slow, self-deprecating mind must have read their admiration. But he kept his eyes fixed on the green water.

"You see," he said, "before you came it was different. I didn't know what I was missin', an' so it didn't matter. Not but what I was dog-sick of it at times, but still I thought I was livin'—thought this was life, and, of course, now I know it ain't. At least, it won't be after you're gone."

"That's strange," she said, not in direct answer to his remark, but as a soliloquy on it as she turned it over in her mind. "This life, now, seems empty to you. All my life seems empty to me. This seems to me the real life, out here in the foothills, with the trees and the mountains, and—and our horses, you know."

She might have ended the sentence in a way that would have come much closer to him, and been much truer, but conventionality had been bred into her for generations and she did not find it possible yet freely to speak the truth.

"It's such a wonderful life," she continued. "One gets so strong and happy in it."

"You'd soon get sick of it," he said. "We don't see nothin'. We don't learn nothin'. Reenie, I'm eighteen, an' I bet you could read an' write better'n me when you was six."

"Did you never go to school?" she asked, in genuine surprise. She knew his speech was ungrammatical, but thought that due to careless training rather than to no training at all.

"Where'd I go to school?" he demanded, bitterly. "There ain't a school within forty miles. Guess I wouldn't have went if I could," he added, as an afterthought, wishing to be quite honest in the matter. "School didn't seem to cut no figure—until jus' lately."

"But you have learned—some?" she continued.

"Some. When I was a little kid my father used to work with me at times. He learned me to read a little, an' to write my name, an' a little more. But things didn't go right between him an' mother, an' he got to drinkin' more an' more, an' jus' making h—— of it. We used to have a mighty fine herd of steers here, but it's all shot to pieces. When we sell a bunch the old man 'll stay in town for a month or more, blowin' the coin and leavin' the debts go. I sneak a couple of steers away now an' then, an' with the money I keep our grocery bills paid up an' have a little to rattle in my jeans. My credit's good at any store in town," and Irene thrilled to the note of pride in his voice as he said this. The boy had real quality in him. "But I'm sick of it all," he continued. "Sick of it, an' I wanna get out."

"You think you are not educated," she answered, trying to meet his outburst as tactfully as possible. "Perhaps you are not, the way we think of it in the city. But I guess you could show the city boys a good many things they don't know, and never will know."

Irene makes a promise full of momentous consequences.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

French Eat Chrysanthemums.

The chrysanthemum is served as a salad in French households.

A gentleman is one who has no business in the world.—Punch.

Cash Tied Up.

A short time ago my girl friend and myself went into an ice-cream parlor. A number of young men were there. While I was waiting for the ice cream cones I raised my hand to my hair and my money (a dime, which was all I had), dropped down my back, and you can imagine my embarrassment when I was compelled to ask the proprietor to charge the cones.—Exchange.